

# Manifesto for a wide-range theory of dramaturgy

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As a field, dramaturgy has a long history. We like to think of it as beginning with Plato and Aristoteles. I suggest that we conceptualise dramaturgy as a science studying the communication of communication, inspired by knowledge from theatre and other performative practices where human body-to-body communication communicates to society about society. To grasp the evolution of dramaturgy we need to combine studies of performative artworks and processes, societal structures, and studies of media-matrixes in a wide-range theoretical perspective. Dramaturgy is a concept with expanding borders – geographically, functionally and theoretically. Is a theory of dramaturgy trying to cope with this expansion at all possible and is it necessary?

*Patrice Pavis: We should, I would suggest, resume our theoretical labours, not necessarily by enumerating all the task of the dramaturge, but by looking for adequate methodological and theoretical tools, in order to think the new situation we are in. At stake might be the future of dramaturgy and its challenges. (Pavis 2014, p. 26).*

## Challenging expansions

An attempt to conceive a theory of dramaturgy gathers momentum in times when the concept and the functions are challenged by expansions. How wide a variety of different areas and professional functions can be managed by a theory behind the concept and its societal functions? In order to grasp the gravity and complexity of the situation, we need to identify some of the important areas of expansion.

## Dramaturgy and values.

As becomes apparent from the use of the word dramaturgy in its very early days, the ideas of “manipulating” with narratives and communication for specific purposes were not restricted to one field of social activity. Tyrants communicated in other forms than did early democratic politics. Religious communication controlled behaviour and social power. In 784 A.D. at the Second Council in Nicaea the Church declared: “The substance of religious scenes is not left to the initiative of artists; it derives from the principles laid down by the Catholic Church and religious tradition ... The art alone belongs to the painter; its organization and arrangement belongs to the clergy.” (Dewey 1980, p. 229). When markets arose as one of the central societal structures, the need to distinguish the honest from the fraudulent tradesman became important, and when religion alone no longer carried the truth, communication took on new forms. Theatre echoed these changes. To whom or what does art belong today? *Which values are currently implementing dramaturgical principles?* Dramaturgy was, from its early beginnings, involved in education, religion and politics. And it still is, perhaps now to a degree never seen before. This increases the need to reconsider how dramaturgy may contribute to actions, experiences and reflections on value. These are values understood not as transcendent essences but rather as functions operating at every level of communication. The future of dramaturgy is indeed, as Pavis states in the quote above, at stake.

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A hyper-complex society needs complex theories.

### **New media-matrix.**

First of all, a theory of dramaturgy must face the unavoidable recognition of the introduction of a new media matrix in society. Transformations of society have historically been influenced by shifts in the use of media: from primarily oral to scriptural, from scarce sources of scriptures to books being printed and distributed, from face-to-face communication and the common availability of books to modern mass media of audio and visual range distributed at speed and to a mass audience. All these transformations change the way in which society communicates. Dramaturgy (and the world as such) is confronted by the fact that, within the last 40 years, society has entered into a *new media-matrix* (Finneman 2011) given the binary alphabet and the computers to handle it, and it is a massive challenge. A theory of dramaturgy has to explain how this transition can be incorporated. Our suggestion is to observe the Internet and the rise of digital media as a new functionally differentiated social system with its own code: connectivity/invisibility, and with its own immense volume of programmes deciding how connections are formed, as access to interactivity and the new global memory, where anything that may be represented might be stored. Dramaturgy may bring with it important knowledge on interactivity and analytical tools regarding communication and the presentation of the digital self on commercial platforms such as Facebook or in non-commercial groups of interest.

### **A dramaturgical ‘turn’.**

It is now a fact that dramaturgy as a concept is being *linked to an increasing number of phenomena* inside the *art system*, the *mass media system*, and the *internet system*. Genealogically, dramaturgies are linked to theatre but also dance, opera, film, TV series, commercials, internet platforms such as Facebook are claimed to have a dramaturgy. The effect of what we have come to know as ‘the linguistic turn’ has been considerable. It has influenced the sciences of history, media studies, sociology and many other fields. Currently, the concept of ‘turn’ has been claimed for so many fields, that we might be advised to moderate the meaning of a ‘turn’. Basically, the many ‘turns’ can be seen as a growing acknowledgement of the fact that modern society *is* communication. We need, however, to think of dramaturgy as being concerned with communication beyond language. If we are not simply referring to dramaturgy as a substitute for “narrative”, we must be able to specify what we mean by dramaturgy. We would thus suggest that this calls for a reconstruction of a basic theory of communication, and as theatre has always been involved in the communication to society of how society communicates, it follows that we need to study communication in the first and second order of observation.

### **Dramaturgy from art to aesthetics.**

If we include phenomena outside the systems of art, mass media, and the Internet, and claim that a lesson in a school class has a dramaturgy, just as the way in which industrial concerns present themselves can be described in dramaturgical terms, we need a theory to specify exactly how dramaturgy contributes to an *expansion of the “aesthetic”*. Even the most enthusiastic historical avant-gardist could not have foreseen the degree to which art could mingle with life. Expansion along the abovementioned vectors is, however, met by a considerable restraining force: *a remarkable decline in the importance of art* in the development of a sociological conversion of neo-liberal, cognitive capitalism and its globalisation. In one respect, aesthetics have lost their

former close connection to art, and been reinvented in “real life”. So now even the sound of a car door closing is refined and controlled in order to please the senses. Does this imply the collapse or de-differentiation of the art system? It is too early for us yet to say. And for the time being, I would suggest that we insist to maintain the distinction between art systems and other functionally differentiated systems. If I am right in pointing at the art system losing weight and influence, the question is how to confront this? Do we embrace or deny the new application of sensual and aesthetic elements in sales-promotion, in project-organisation, in the narratives of companies or goods, in the aesthetics of a new digital self? Perhaps the wisest thing to do would be to observe! But how? Maybe a theory of dramaturgy might add some ways to clarify and address how the communication of communication is produced in our hyper-complex society. Our senses are addressed in so many ways in our everyday lives that we may end up being aestheticized. Dramaturgy may need to be able to provide a description and an analysis of processes involving the communication of communication with specific system references aside from the artistic. It becomes clear that our theory of dramaturgy must contain a theory of how form and medium interact, and experiment with observing production processes and their evolution. Again, we might draw on our dramaturgical knowledge from observing artistic creative processes and their evolution. Put succinctly: a theory about how a recursive process integrating action/experience with reflection can be analysed in both first and second order observations.

### **Dramaturgy in global and educational expansion**

In time, dramaturgy as concept and function has entered a *phase of globalisation*, not least because it has been adopted in English-speaking countries over the last 30 years. As the concept of dramaturgy has been spread to English-speaking countries and widened its global scope, a fourth important momentum has been added to our search for a theory of dramaturgy. Many universities around the globe have now departments or courses in dramaturgy, and modern dramaturgy suggests several different professional functions to which one might be educated. This function primarily deals with different aspects of producing theatre or narratives in other human communication-based media. The professional function can be applied in different phases of the production process, for example, in establishing the theatres’ local political positions and their repertoires, text development with a playwright or a group, the devising of a performance, and the elaboration of public relations or educational material for theatres. Dramaturges also work inside mass media (radio, television, film, etc.). Furthermore, they may apply their skills in other societal systems: in education or health systems, in business or spare-time systems. The documentation of this expansion can be found in anthologies and books on the subject (Romanska 2015). However, how do we train dramaturges? How could the theoretical foundation for these activities be articulated? To create an answer to this, we suggest that we make an important distinction between two kinds of dramaturgical theory: one situated inside the system of science, in universities, and the other situated inside the art system where dramaturges continuously reflect upon their practices and strategies. We need to consider the evolution of a *scientific theory* as something different from the evolution of a *reflective theory*. They need each other in their difference from one another.

### **Draw a distinction:**

#### ***Dramaturgy emerges comparing ‘reflection theory’ and ‘scientific theory’.***

Scientific work deals with comparisons. We compare phenomena of increasingly different

appearances in order to expand our understanding of how it all works. It is not merely to look for any confirmation of transcendent truths out there, or in order to come still closer to reality “as it really is”, but instead to expand the complexity of our understanding. To compare the timing of a fall of a feather and an apple makes those two asymmetric, dissimilar objects comparable in order to explain how the difference in speed of falling relates to other differences between the two objects. What science does, generally speaking, is to find ways to formulate ever more daring, more improbable, more amazing comparisons that aim *to expand the field of practical re-substitutions of the results* (Luhmann 1990). In other words, science needs to lead the temporary points of comparisons in a direction that allows a comparison of still more implausible connections to *explain* by combining theoretical sentences in still more complex theoretical programmes. Theories are forms in which explanations can be communicated and reformulated. Theory relates to reality understood as an unmarked space. Reality is an infinitely complex simultaneity of matter, spaces and movements. The only chance we have to create *meaning* (also scientifically) is momentarily to produce a ‘stop’ of this restless movement and reduce complexity. In order to do so, we need time, communication and observations, i.e. an operation that indicates something as distinct from something else. In a world of infinite complexity, we need theoretical input from many different, loosely coupled sciences.

The word dramaturgy has numerous roots, most often one points to its Greek origins, *dran*: “to do” and *ergon*: “work” (with a colloquial connotation in classic Greek “intercourse”). Its meaning is unstable. Dramaturgy thus refers to “working on/with drama”, “put into dramatic form”, or to the “structure of a play” or even, in a very early meaning, to “manipulation of political reality”, where a dramaturge would be someone who manipulated decision-making in political life – an early spin doctor (Luckhurst 2006, p. 6). Dramaturgy today, is still a contested concept. One part of dramaturgy points to an internal structure of a given artefact, be it text or performance of theatre, dance, opera, musical, the circus, etc. This structure operates on the level of the single work of art. When comparing synchronic structures, i.e. the dramaturgies of a given epoch, patterns emerge indicating significant differences in simultaneous communicative forms of information and utterances. When comparing from a diachronic perspective, i.e. dramaturgies as they vary over many different epochs, other dissimilarities appear. History suggests that such differences are linked to changes in both societal structures, and media matrixes. Dramaturgies must therefore be assumed to exist in the plural, and theory must allow for the *comparison* of different typologies, whether we call them ‘programmes’, ‘genres’ or ‘traditions’. For the purpose of comparison, dramaturgical theory must be as transparent as possible in describing *how* it compares and builds its landscapes of genres, and *avoid normative judgments* in the scientific theory of evolution of such experiments.

I suggest that, in order to construct a theory of dramaturgy, we first of all need to draw a distinction: there are, at present, two different kinds of dramaturgical theory: The first is an *art system internal reflection theory*. Here, dramaturges and artists inside the art system reflect upon how theatre and other art forms communicate. They develop theories in connection with the daily development of artworks, their production and presentation. The other type of dramaturgy is a *scientific theory*. Here, dramaturges inside the science system observe how dramaturgy functions in, for instance, the art system. Based on theoretical discussions of these observations, concepts and relations are described. If the scientific theory arrives at proper levels of generalisation, it is possible to observe the phenomenon in other functionally differentiated systems with dramaturgical concepts. Any functionally differentiated societal system develops its own reflection theory. In the science system,

the reflection theory tries to reflect on how knowledge and truth may be generated. Epistemology, or a theory of sciences, carries the discussion about the “best” way to proceed scientifically in the pursuit of truth. The science system has been differentiated as a long and slow process from the Renaissance to today as the one system in society which provides truth-seeking results. The art system has been differentiated from around 1750, first in a chaotic phase of Enlightenment to 1850, and then in a phase of accumulating self-reflection on Modernity.

This approach to the construction of theories of dramaturgy, is up against a tradition that sees an advantage in considering dramaturgy as something “betwixt and between” theory and practice: a bridge between science and art, upon which the dramaturge, as another speedy traveller, tramps her bike from one landscape to another. Marianne van Kerkhoven summarised her findings on dramaturgy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as follows (Kerkhoven 2009):

Dramaturgy is for me learning to handle complexity. It is feeding the ongoing conversation on the work; it is taking care of the reflexive potential as well as of the poetic force of the creation. Dramaturgy is building bridges, it is being responsible for the whole, dramaturgy is above all a constant movement. Inside and outside. The readiness to dive into the work, and to withdraw from it again and again, inside, outside, trampling the leaves. A constant movement. *Wenn ich still stehe, verstehe ich nichts.*

This is a compelling picture, and it contains important and central insights, but from my perspective it misses one important point: when you cross the border between systems, you change your point of reference, and thus your communication. That is not to say that dramaturges working as artists and scientists are unable to communicate. When we say that the two forms need each other *in their difference* from each other, it is to acknowledge that communication is always system-specific. The expansion of dramaturgy is met with some (even considerable) resistance: many theatre artists have low opinions of what dramaturges do; they are often considered a kind of normative judges or censors – foreign bodies in the artistic processes. Dramaturgy is regarded with suspicion as something theoretical and distant to artistic work. It may be more appropriate today to insist on the fact that every artist involved in the production of a performance needs to know about dramaturgy. Within science, the attempts to create a coherent theory are handicapped by the limited number of full-time academic researchers in the field, along with unclear relations to literature, media, communication, and theatre sciences. The possibility of (co)operating across a broad field of sciences is dependent on a dramaturgy that allows couplings across traditional borders between humanistic researchers, clearly stating what dramaturgy may ‘deliver’ in terms of theory and methods. The development of such a theory has been met with a somewhat reluctant attitude among researchers of dramaturgy towards attempts to generate a comprehensive body of theory.

Theatre today is concerned with an outreach towards new groups of audiences and other art forms (dance, music, sculpture and installations, circus, etc.) in an attempt to develop new dramaturgical structures and forms. Some experiments are concerned with increased self-reflective structures applied in the works of art, whether as meta-fictional dramaturgies or dramaturgies of interaction applied to works involving the spectator as a participant in the imaginary reality. This increase in the art system’s internal complexity co-evolves with a significant decrease in the societal consideration and valuation of art. Other systems generate much more attention, the mass media and the Internet for instance. This leads to a situation where questions of legitimisation are raised frequently. This is the case for both the art system and the art sciences. How do we address this situation? One of the possible ways, I would suggest, is to develop a strong, wide-range theory of

dramaturgy. How has this been done within, for instance, theatre science?

Describing the world as a stage and our lives as but characters in a play is well known from the Middle Ages. In more recent times, Erving Goffman: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), and Guy Debord (1967): *La société du spectacle*, use theatrical metaphors to conduct a sociological description of modern society: Goffman in a semi-phenomenological and Debord in quasi-marxistic epistemology. As an impressive example within contemporary theatre science, a voluminous and comprehensive German-based research project: "*Theater als Paradigma der Moderne*" (Theatre as Paradigm of Modernity) began in 1992 and was concluded in 2001. It included more than 200 researchers from theatre science and many other disciplines and attracted several million Euros in subsidies. This project can be considered a thought-provoking example of how an art science interprets the demands put on the science system by other functionally differentiated systems in society. The university, as an organisation within the science system, has to be an interpretative system: it observes the surrounding world, the potential markets, customers and manufacturers in order to discover potential "lacks" that might be filled with the knowledge the system is able to deliver. The interpretative system must discover its 'niche', determine the geography within it, and then 'invent' the needs and desires requiring to be fulfilled. The interpretative system discovers its own strengths and is able to connect to ever-changing demands on research goals. When the German project completed the last of the official publications (Balme et.al. 2003c) there was added a significant question mark to the title: "Theatre as Paradigm of Modernity?" There are many very interesting articles in the many volumes (Fischer-Lichte et.al. 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) published during the project. And as the titles suggest, several focal concepts appeared in the process: Staging, authenticity, embodiment, perception, mediatization, performativity, event, ritual. The interpretative research system developed an expansion of 'theatre', and hence of theatre science and its customers, by 'discovering' that present-day society can be described as the 'staging' of 'embodied events' triggering 'perceptions of authenticity', which, in a 'mediatised society', become a 'ritual' of 'performativity'. In this way, theatre may be seen as a paradigm describing central features of our society. When Professor Erika Fischer-Lichte ventures an attempt to subsume some of the results of the impressive work into her informative book on an Aesthetic of the Performative (Fischer-Lichte 2004), we are presented with the concept of the "performative turn". This turn could allegedly be the result of new forms of theatre emerging in the 1970s as a form of neo-avant-garde pursuing a collapse of the distinction between the imaginary reality and reality. Erika Fischer-Lichte privileges the avant-garde and its attempt to make reality explode in a way that allows us to see the world 'as it really is'. It is worth noticing that the former hermeneutic approach of Fischer-Lichte has now been replaced by an interesting mixture of phenomenology and post-structuralism, but without any explicit discussion or recognition of the important difference between the two epistemologies: that of thinking in identity versus thinking with differences. It is somehow characteristic of enterprises of this magnitude that they tend to end up in a cluttered plurality without any *theoretical* sensitivity towards more systematic possibilities to focus and combine the research results. The scientific effect of the many minor, but important, contributions, are then easily lost, perhaps due to the fact that many participants use the funding and the common thematic frame as an occasion to prolong whatever it is he or she is researching, in order to be part of the common endeavour. This is, of course, the results of traditions within the humanities to create projects driven by single researchers, which are far more widespread than in other scientific fields. Major projects are therefore frequently seen as an opportunity to finance and prove important aspects of the research area of the *single* researcher. As a consequence, we are

presented with a variety of visions, concepts, theories and methods of the organising field, to be applied to a whole range of new fields. The price often paid is that core concepts are expanded in so many different directions and so widely that their power of communication is diminished. I venture another approach to the new demands, and argue for the necessity of a *wide-range theory* of dramaturgy. The concept 'wide-range' is intended to mark a difference to Grand Theory and Mid-level Theory.

**Observe observers: arguments for and against a wide-range theory.**

**Laura Cull: *Theatre of Immanence* (Cull 2012)**

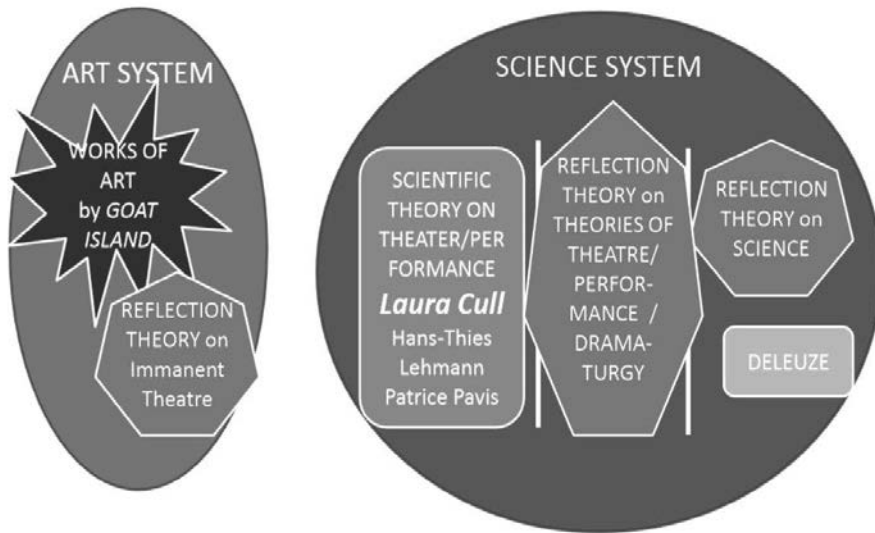
When I chose to use Laura Cull's book as an example of a dramaturgical theory, it is because she insists on describing the dramaturgy of an immanent theatre. Within her theoretical architecture, Cull makes recursive movements between her observations of works of art and the poetics of an immanent theatre, and stimulates this further by discussions with other performance theoretical approaches. Cull also makes recursive movements between epistemology and performance theory where her expressed reference throughout the book is the works of Deleuze, but as Cull is responsive to critical features in Deleuzian thought, she supplements the scientific reflective theory with observations by Bergson and Mullarkey. My use of the book is thus an attempt to meet the requirements in a debate on how this dramaturgy works, and to draw conclusions as to the impact such work has on a wide-range theoretical construction of a scientific reflection theory on dramaturgy. In order to do so, we need to take a closer look at Laura Cull's project. In her study, Laura Cull makes it clear that there is no prescription guaranteeing the 'right' way to make a theatre of immanence, it is aware of its own experimental quality. Consequently, it is neither a universal or global theory, nor a programme of action, which could guarantee immanence. It is instead an attempt to rethink performance itself as a kind of philosophy as opposed to a tendency within the research field of theatre/performance and philosophy "merely to apply philosophy, to treat performance as the illustration of pre-existing philosophical thought, rather than its own kind of thinking" (p.3). It is a study of "singular solutions to highly specific problems" (p.21).

But what kind of problems? One way to describe the problem that Cull addresses could start with the image of a performer using ten minutes or more to rub the upper side of his hand with the fingers of the other hand. Or a performer stands on one leg for almost as long as she manages. While these extreme slow performative images provoke the audience, other series of movements and gestures are repeated by one or several performers, small 'dances', movements that flow in different tempi (Goat Island 2004). How on earth should one attempt to generate meaning in such images of performance? Cull suggests that positive values may be attached to this art form, which include aesthetic, ethical and political dimensions. The 'problem' is works of art that sufficiently 'irritate' the scientific system to make it react. The artists included in Cull's selection are: Artaud, Cage, Kaprow, Clark, Hijikata, Bene, The Living Theatre, Lavaudant, Coates, Goat Island and Wilson. Cull has chosen to approach the challenge by consulting the works of Gilles Deleuze. This is not merely to apply these thoughts in an illustrative way, but also to find "a two-way flow of ideas, creating a concept of immanent theatre through a balanced engagement with performance and philosophy, with each accorded equal status as a kind of thinking" (p.15). However, for Cull, it is not only a project of clarifying a concept; it is also an attempt to *value* the immanent theatre. Thus, it is a question of "addressing the aesthetic and ethical question of how different performances or

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different experiences of participation might be valued with respect to immanence” (p.178). In my opinion, this request focuses upon an important discussion in a scientific theory of art: **how** should such valuation be conducted, **if at all!?** Can art science produce more than “singular solutions to specific problems”?

Another way to describe the problem is to take a closer look at the theoretical architecture of Laura Cull’s project. In a diagrammatic form, it could look like this:



When I observe Laura Cull’s observations, it is necessary to draw distinctions between four different forms of theory. Laura Cull’s work investigates a specific kind of artwork, such as, for example, those of the Chicago-based performance group Goat Island. Several of the artists involved in the work of the group have written or talked about their work. This is an example of what we have called, 1) reflection theory: Here, an art system’s internal theoretical reflection on the kind of art to which the group adheres. There is a recursive evolution of artworks and poetics in the history of the group. Laura Cull observes from inside the science system. She thus develops, 2) a scientific theory on performance and methods to observe the specific art form she calls immanent theatre. Cull’s theoretical evolution is based on internal discussions with other theatre/performance theoreticians, for instance Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrice Pavis, but as her explicit epistemological recursive base, she uses, 3) reflection theory of science as it appears in the epistemological basis of the works of Gilles Deleuze. Here, science reflects upon itself, what Deleuze would term philosophy. Finally, there exists a fourth form of theory, 4) wide-range theory, which we find as a mediator between specific scientific theory and reflective science theory. In this, we compare many different scientific theories on theatre, performance, dramaturgy with different epistemological perspectives in order to design a wide-range theory, in our case of dramaturgy. A wide-range theory reflectively interpenetrates scientific (2) and reflection theory (3) in order to observe how observers observe.

Cull sees the “philosophical turn” in the international field of theatre and performance research in need of a thorough investigation of how the works of Gilles Deleuze might inspire further research as she finds it has to have been under-theorized so far. As such, it describes an exemplary recursive



movement between scientific reflection theory (epistemology) and analytical sensitive explanation of contemporary theatre and performance. It is exemplary in the sense that it clearly states its own research perspective and is aware of the dangers of “performance-philosophy”, namely a tendency to “merely *apply* philosophy to performance, to treat performance as the illustration of pre-existing philosophical thought, rather than its *own kind of thinking*” (second emphasis is mine p.3).

Let us return to the performance by Goat Island and the hand rubbing gesture. The group expresses a wish to “enfold the performer and spectator into the same condition of (unfulfilled) expectancy” (Bailes 2007, p. 39)<sup>1</sup>. How does this condition come into being? As far as I can see, it must be in the performance’s negation of what the spectator would expect, i.e. communication where the spectator could draw on habitual selections of information and utterance in order to select an understanding. When the particular moment in the performance arrives, the spectator will already have been challenged by the non-representational intentions in the aesthetics. A considerable amount of hints have already been given as what to expect, but the extremely prolonged event of “rubbing hands” highlights the “condition”: The spectators who have not yet given up, will possibly use the long session to investigate different options: attempts to find possible information in the utterance of rubbing the upper side of one hand with the fingers of the other. Let us try to join the spectator: is the figure in need of touching himself, in order to experience himself? He does it repeatedly, there might be slight changes in his tempo or rhythm, but this does not generate new information. I meet my own impatience: why does she keep on going in the same way? I am eager to select an understanding, but there seems to be preciously little information. Do I have to invent my own information: it is a picture of a male, lost in compulsive repetition of a special movement – maybe it reminds him of something? Etcetera ... etcetera.

We have arrived, I think, at the border of artistic communication. It seems that the aesthetic of the performance concentrates on utterance, but without any specific information, apart from the associations that are solely the product of the spectator. Or, in other words, the performance wants to inform us, that *it is only an utterance*. Somehow the spectator is enfolded in the paradox: expecting communication from art, but only seeing utterances. What understanding should then be selected? As spectator, you might wonder why you would spend your time (and money) in this way, you experience your own reactions towards the unfulfilled expectations: no story to follow, no characters to get involved in, only hints, but towards what?

The affect of becoming impatient is what alerts us not only to our own duration, but to its difference in kind from the many other durations pulsing within the real. [...] Goat Island are still concerned with ontological participation reconceived as taking part in the plurality of rhythms making up the actual. (p.200)

It is a gesture towards the “actual” but it happens in an art-form. This does, however, not provide us with an answer to the question of what kind of life it affirms.

What we have seen so far is the contours of an anti-mimetic text-theory. It is one side of Deleuze’s authorship. Another side is the emphatic tone that arises in some of the works coauthored with Felix Guattari such as *Rhizome*, where we find sentences such as “Le multiple, il faut le faire”: It is necessary to not only write it, but also to live it. This multiplicity becomes the generalised message; and Laura Cull embraces this as a moral precept for an affirmative praxis. It is a suggestion for rules to live by, that will generate another, and better, way to tackle life than any praxis based on a habitual acceptance of the power of unity and identity. Consequently, the affirmative position on

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1) Cull 2012, p. 199, quotes from this.

art would include ‘multiplicities’ that do not accept artificial borders by the hegemony of an art-system. Such borders would be territorializations and power-abuse. A constant revolution should, according to Deleuze and Guattari, be the goal, as actions performed in the world, and as a cure of some of our cultural diseases.

I do agree that, as a prolific thinker of difference, Deleuze provides an inspiratory approach to vitalism and the need to rethink values. On the other hand, a certain amount of moralism is detectable in the insistence on speed, rhizomatic thinking, and immanence – in a word dissemination. Such a reterritorialisation of ontology of temporality – of becoming, in opposition to restriction of being, is what makes Deleuze an affirmative vitalist, and thus a philosopher not concerned with ‘condition of possibilities’ for producing a discourse about the world, but for actions performed *in* the world. This is the strength of Deleuze’s position, but also the weakness: Is this emphatic insistence on a constant mutual becoming-revolutionary in a state between the major and the minor, really what should be affirmed? Is this an ethical absolute? My colleague, Niels Lehmann notes:

What’s at work here appears in reality to be a quite strict ethics. The powerful usurper of power is directed to cease being “major”, while the minor is directed to avoid any re-territorializing inversion by staying “minor”. [...] It seems to me all the tropes of philosophical becoming in Deleuze and Guattari are marked by this kind of moralizing. [...] It is a classic ethical concern for the minor (or should we say the weak?), who are affected by the power force of the major. In this light one might venture the thesis, that their insistence on not to violate the flow of life by paralyzing it, in reality is an expression of a generalization of the commandment of charity. (Lehmann 1995, p. 69).

What seems to be a central problem here is the idea of a constant movement, which should be able to eliminate power as such. Deleuze and Guattari are aware that this is indeed a difficult maneuver, but are ethics a necessity?

On this background it is difficult to abstain from venturing an additional hypothesis, that exactly this constant worry for the marginalized other has paved the way for Deleuze in particular to take over the main role after Derrida on the American intellectual stage, where “political correctness” plays a major part (op. cit. p.79).

Laura Cull’s ambition to evaluate and provide normative measurements of degrees of immanence is undoubtedly a genuine concern for the marginalised other; it does, however, leave art-theory in a troublesome position mingling analytical procedures and arbiter of tastes.

Another concern connected with the question of what life to affirm has been voiced, and Laura Cull quotes accusations claiming Deleuze’s affirmation of immanence is perfectly suited to the new spirit of capitalism. A “set of beliefs associated with the capitalist order that helps us justify this order, and, by legitimating them to sustain the forms of action and predispositions compatible with it” (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007, p. 10). From the mid-1980s neo-liberalism gave important political openings to support globalisation. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher helped to provide the legal conditions whereby finance and media could move unrestrictedly all over the world. Reagan’s “open sky” policy made it possible for the mass media organisations to transmit, via satellite, across borders to multimillion audiences. From 1980, another new element entered the production of goods. It became obvious that in order to increase growth on the market, new products had to be invented in a constant flow, further, the exponential spread of Internet-related communication and trade provided whole new markets which were, to some degree, independent of the production of physical goods. In terms of cooperation each employee had to be in contact with a still larger number of other employees, and networking was seen as a means to make collaboration more effective. In short, capitalism became dependent on knowledge. The cognitive capacity of the

employees became the new immaterial capital. *Cognitive Capitalism* accumulates capital through the use and exploitation of the immaterial cognitive and cooperative work with information and knowledge. The main point is the fact that employees now not only provide their manual labour but also have to invest all their mental faculties as well. The know-how stored in their minds becomes the most important raw material. It follows that now it is no longer sufficient for the employers to make their employees love their work, *they must be able to invent the meaning in what they are doing* (Kure. N 2011), as it appears in contemporary managerial literature. In this regard, the company provides frames for the employer, who is supposed to know why the job producing toys for children (Lego©) gives meaning apart from providing owners and shareholders with profits and high interest rates. The meaning must be “invented” by the employee, “binding back” *religio* to some transcendent truth thus providing the immanent with meaning. Cognitive Capitalism, together with the international abandonment of debt to be guaranteed by reserves in gold in 1971, were indications of capitalism entering into its third phase. It is the exponential growth of debts that has provided the possibility for a financial capitalism to make us all, individual citizens and national states included, into debt slaves: where 99% of the population is either without assets or indebted to 1% of the human race. This, since the year 2000, has led to the absurd situation in the USA and Europe that the total growth in production is equivalent to the newly accumulated debts (Metz & Sesslen 2012)! The pressure from this development in the system of production upon the universities is a constant demand on competitive solutions and job-orientation and it stresses the need for new legitimisations of each single discipline. Within the science system there are, of course, varying degrees of pertinence of these new demands. Humanities is, without doubt, a field under heavy pressure and critique. However, it cannot be repudiated that the field might benefit from such opposition, as it might provoke new understanding and reasoning. The development is irreversible and, as such, should not be lamented but rather, in my opinion, seen as a *challenge to develop new theoretical understandings*. This is, of course, only one of many other necessary changes inside the university. Educational methods insisting on scientific quality applied to complex historical and contemporary problems have to be invented, but this takes time, and universities have by and large chosen to follow quantitative goals.

## Compare

Inside the art system different reactions to the global financial, climatic, and political phenomenon are traceable. The deliberative democracy is under heavy pressure, so attempts to give voice to people and their concerns can be developed in audience-involving projects including citizens on stage – as those telling the stories, as participating in the creation of the work, as immersed in the performance, etc. In another direction standing opposite that of ‘theatre of immanence’, we find a movement towards a re-vitalisation of realism. Bernd Stegemann criticises the “postmodern” trends in contemporary theatre:

What once was recognised as a modern feeling of estranging solitude is now, through the paradoxical sensuality of the performance, reconfigured as an aesthetic event. The confusion confronted with undecidability, and the discomfort experiencing inconsistent opposites, are deprived of its societal dimension, and reconfigured as experiences relative to the subject, and as such only to be understood as contingent. The practice of contingency is also the efficient profit of the flexible employee<sup>2</sup>. (Stegemann 2013, p. 34, my translation).

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2) “Durch die paradoxe Sinnlichkeit der Performance wird das vormals als Entfremdung bezeichnete Ge-

His arguments for recapturing a new realism stress the need for new analytical instruments applied in the creation of theatre. As long as the performative part of theatre is measured against the representative parts, art can only find its own importance in an ever-increasing complexity of its own formal elements. The look is turned inwards. New Realism is a reaction against this deadlock. If the theatre wants to explore the line of fractures it needs to understand how the secret of 40 years of the uninhibited growth of financial industries has been converted into a powerless acceptance of an alternative-less truth, a belief in a duty to return gigantic debts, yet still continue a blind belief in growth. Theatre must, according to Stegemann (p. 160), find ways to perform, that make this daily performed action turn against itself: action should *not* be understood as performing of realities with contingent and endless possibilities, simultaneously negating the very action as “performed”. Action should be seen as something with an end in mind, other than the mere performing of the action, and it should be possible to recognise an intention, that leads towards possible conflicts.

To construct a theory of dramaturgy that is able to compare positions such as those of Cull and Stegemann, we need an understanding of the different epistemological perspectives. As much as they share a preference for thinking in differences, they seem to disagree in terms of what kind of differences to use: Cull siding with post-structuralist thinking in *dissemination*, and Stegemann insisting on the need to think with *distinctions*, inspired by Luhmann and Rancière. Here, the insight of my colleague Niels Lehmann (2004) clarifies the difference<sup>3</sup>. Going post-ontological means to abandon many traditional philosophical questions: we no longer need to answer Platonic questions (Richard Rorty), or rather, no more Platonic answers to Platonic questions. So we identify a one-world-theory. Additionally, it becomes clear that, in order to distinguish between different theories of difference, we need to be precise in our description of what *kind of difference* is preferred: dissemination or distinction? Finally, we need to clarify whether the theory in question is leaning towards ‘reduction’ generalising irreducible last elements and an understanding of elements and their relation (Derrida and Luhmann), or towards a more ‘holistic’ understanding of multiple worlds as a gesture describing the force of difference; discovering worlds within worlds and new vocabularies (Deleuze and Rorty)? Post-ontologically it remains clear: there are no absolutizing answers to the constant struggle between reduction and holism. No unification making the distinction obsolete. In terms of a theory of dramaturgy, we need to make it clear that it starts from a post-ontological position. That it has to choose a perspective inside that position. No laws – out there – can be said to predetermine this choice. It is indeed contingent. Therefore, as is the case with both Cull and Stegemann, one can only hope to connect to different contexts. As I have chosen to work with inspiration from Luhmann, employing the leading difference system > < environment, this can be described as a hope that my work on dramaturgy inside the scientific system, observing how dramaturgy functions in the art-system, will provide a vocabulary that inspires analysis inside the art system as well as in other functionally differentiated systems. In a theory based on a wide-range systems thinking, one important question is: who observes, and how?

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fühl moderner Vereinzelung zu einem ästhetischen Ereignis. Das Regime des Sinnlichen wird hierdurch neu aufgeteilt: Die Verwirrung im Angesicht des Unentscheidbaren und das Unbehagen im Erleben unvereinbarer Widersprüche werden ihrer gesellschaftlichen Dimension beraubt und zu relative Erlebnissen von Subjekten umgestaltet, die sie dadurch als Kontingent begreifen müssen. Die Kontingenz ist dann auch der effizienten Nutzen für die Entwicklung des flexiblen Mitarbeiters“.

- 3) Here Niels Lehmann shows how a crucial difference between thinkers of difference can be established by carefully distinguishing between *dissemination* and *distinction*, and orthogonal to this another distinction between critical cognition and search for forcefulness.

### One concept, one definition or one theory?

This might, however, be controversial. Some of the recent scholars of dramaturgy seem to believe that such an endeavour is futile:

A conclusion that would subsume the many different aspects and the varied tasks of the dramaturges in one concept is not possible, neither in scientific nor artistic point of views. [...] The experiment to draw lines might be risked, in order to make differences and nuances visible, so that in the end – despite the apparently unmanageable variation – one could provide a thesis that claimed dramaturgical occupation as both analytical and artistic and placed the two abilities on same rank. (Roeder 2011, p. 269, my translation).

Anke Roeder, editor of an anthology on dramaturgy in Germany, suggests that the variety of task and aspects in the job as dramaturge are so many and widespread that it seems impossible to imagine a single theory subsuming them. In one sense, I do agree with this statement: It seems questionable to meld a scientific theory of dramaturgy with the artistic employment of dramaturgy. It is unmistakably true that dramaturges working in the art system are part of artistic projects. Dramaturges reflecting in theoretical form over their daily artistic work deliver important input into the theory of self-reflection *within the art system*. On the other hand, dramaturges reflecting on dramaturgy *inside the science system* have to comply with other demands. They must reflect on an epistemological level, and in ways consistent with the challenges of a scientific peer group. These two different types of dramaturgy need each other *in their difference to each other*. The existence of two dramaturgies can be reflected by the fact that, in Germany, we find two “dramaturgical societies”: one is the “Dramaturgische Gesellschaft” from 1956 with members today numbering over 600, who might be theatre makers of all genres and all organisations, whether municipal theatres or independent scenes, as well as publishers, journalists and students. The other is “Arbeitsgruppe Dramaturgie der Gesellschaft für Theaterwissenschaft” founded in 2008, with 40 members, dealing with scientific research observing the ‘dynamic relations that are inherent in every performance as relational processes between elements in the weave of direction and its function on and interaction with the spectator’. This research should enable perspectives on selected fields and methods to be framed within a *science of theatre* oriented towards dramaturgy.

In the first publication from this group (Pewny et al 2014) we find the following statement: “It is next to impossible to consolidate these divergent arts practises into one unifying definition of dramaturgy.” (p. 7). This is also the reason for the title using dramaturgies in the plural. To have used the singular ‘dramaturgy’ would, according to the editors:

Imply a misplaced grandeur and unifying generalising logic that is absent in performance and dramaturgical practices of the last decade, and that the editors of this volume do not subscribe to. On the contrary, this book aims to open up the discussion about the heterogeneous future of dramaturgy as a concept and a practice. [...] That future is diverse, disparate and heterogeneous. It is a future of *dramaturgies*.

First of all, what kind of science insists upon the necessity of applying identical logics in practices and theories? If one kind of logic is applied in dramaturgical practices, should the same logic be applied in theory? Reading the articles could lead one to suggest that there are, in fact, several generalising logics at work behind this construction of dramaturgy. These are based upon diverse scientific models of difference, such as in reference to Rancière, but also a number of phenomenological positions are introduced. As discussions inside the field of phenomenology suggest, there are *essentialist* positions closer to Husserl and Heidegger, where insistence on the relation to the Other could point us in the direction of *Sinn des Lebens* “the proper meaning of

existence” (Husserl), or even towards *da-sein*, existence (Heidegger), while other positions also referring to *intersubjectivity* insist on an authenticity in meeting the Other as something neither perceptual or cognitive, but *ethical* (Lévinas or Sartre). This is, of course, a consequence of many different epistemologies at work. These positions *cannot* be unified or subsumed by one Grand Theory if, by this, we imagine one theory to encompass all theories, subsuming them under its own concepts. To construct such a metamodel would be to claim a position located above all other positions; we are dealing with the paradox problem of unity and plurality. What might be possible is to move the point of observation in a direction that allows a comparison of how society may inform itself using concepts that are *selectively relational*. May the future be as diverse and heterogeneous as imaginable; we still have to rely on communication. New ideas will have to be tested and accepted or discarded. Society will still need to confront itself, and art can play an important role if it acknowledges the paradoxes and creates stumbling blocks for our communication by establishing images of how we may circumvent paradoxes by changing perspectives.

The concepts of dramaturgy have found their way into the theatre in English-speaking countries (Cardullo 1995, Proehl & Lupu 1997, Luckhurst 2006). This has provided many introductions and anthologies enumerating dramaturgical work-fields and methods. In a very informative and useful guide to contemporary dramaturgy in England, the authors comment upon the difficulties of definitions:

In this chapter, we do not propose to offer a final definition of the term ‘dramaturgy’, since this would inevitably be reductive. While we aim to be as specific as possible, the very attempt to be so leads one to recognize the many complexities and multiple possibilities inherent in the concept and practice of dramaturgy. However, we do aim to provide clarification of some possible uses of the word, and to exemplify what it means to look at the dramaturgy of a play, or performance, or to provide a dramaturgical analysis. (Turner & Behrndt, 2008, p. 19).

With this agenda, Turner and Behrndt provide examples of diverse dramaturgical praxis within the art system and different types of theatre institutions, with playwrights, and as production dramaturges in devising processes. And, of course, Turner and Behrndt are right in pointing to the dilemma between specific and general terms, and the difficulties with reduction. However, this distinction needs some clarification. The implicit critique of generalisations in the above quote appears to indicate that theory is inevitably reductive, perhaps because it is regarded as speculation and has to establish itself without empirical analysis, or perhaps because theory is only perceived as mid-range and placed in an insoluble dilemma between micro- and macro-analysis. As mentioned earlier, this battle between reduction and generalisation has no totalising solution. Rather, it is an ongoing process. What seems to be at stake in the quote and in the project of Turner and Behrndt is a misleading approach to scientific work: comparisons are closely connected to *normative* valuations. The progressive theatre must be a critical theatre, fighting for greater justice, freedom or equality. This is fine if justice, freedom and equality as such were absolute values. However, the fundamental problem here and in the earlier quoted examples, is that this leads to both an easy and solid alliance between ideology and empiricism, because relatively simple empirical methods provide satisfying results. Science, however, comes out of this as the loser, because almost no theoretical effort is needed, and thus evolution of theory is left behind.

Mary Luckhurst has written a book that states dramaturgy as a revolution in theatre. It is, taking her findings into consideration, a surprisingly bold statement:

Scholarship which promulgates universal definition merely layers confusion upon confusion. This book therefore offers no fixed definition, but instead examines certain functions of professional

theatre-making which from Shakespeare to the present persistently falls within the (overlapping) spheres of dramaturgy and literary management. [...] When a historically or culturally specific meaning must be understood, or seems helpful, it is established and analysed, but from chapter to chapter, *mutatis mutandis*, it is functions not labels that define my investigation. (Luckhurst 2006, p. 11f).

Again, we meet an understanding of theory that clearly marks a distance to universal definitions, and prefers to analyse functions. It is a choice of epistemology that provide well-researched material, but the lack of a theoretical perspective threatens to leave its reader with a pile of material with few outlooks to contemporary dramaturgy and its theory. The book is, in itself, an important contribution to the redescription of dramaturgy, and a plea for its necessity; however, a comment on the concept of 'universal' could perhaps help to clarify: In the semantics of Old Europe, the schemas of "Whole/Unity and Part/Units" were based on a cosmology where the cosmos was a unity, a whole that consisted of parts. This semantic had, according to Niklas Luhmann to be abandoned in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

World society has too little visible harmony for it to be understood as such [cosmos, JSz]. The traditional schema has therefore been replaced by the less demanding distinction between *particular* (regional, ethnic, cultural) and *universal* forms of meaning (that can be used everywhere). This makes it possible to elaborate particularity in explicit opposition to the universal structures of the modern world (e.g., as religious fundamentalism) and at the same time to participate in the technical conditions of modernity (e.g., mass media, travel, banking). World-societal universality can then even become a condition for the comparative cultivation of local particularities. (Luhmann 1997).

It seems fair to remind ourselves that, in order to understand the very particular and specific functions of dramaturges, we need to study them as functions in a world-society. What Luckhurst reacts against is most probably a universalism that *claims to give meaning everywhere*. She sees universal theories as something that provides fixed definitions, and they produce confusion when these definitions can be shown not to work universally. More fixed definitions contribute to more confusion. However, theories that claim universal validity in modern science must reconstruct the concept of universality. Luckhurst perceives historically and culturally specific meanings worth analysing in order to get at the 'function'. How does the analytical work proceed from the fixed meaning in words or concepts to disclose a function? Luckhurst suggests this with the phrase 'mutatis mutandis', that the meaning or matter remains the same while the 'labels' change. Could this not be considered an unlucky universalisation? Any comparison requires a position to provide appoint of comparison. I would suggest that this point necessitates some sort of abstraction, no matter what the intentions are, and it will inevitably include a process of universalisation. In order to see through words and concepts to their function, we need to observe the distinctions, the forms used. Studying reflexion theories in functional systems makes it profusely clear that changes in the societal body of ideas are set in motion by changes in the reflection theories. One of the most important problems for a hyper-complex modern society is that each functional system develops its own semantics, and they cannot be reduced to a common denominator, e.g. world of modern states, capitalist or secularised society, these concepts are universalising in a way that does not lead anywhere near a theory of society. This is where a new interdependency between the particular and universal becomes discernible. Inside a functional system, concepts function as valid – everywhere in the system itself – universally (in the local system). To observe these local semantic forms in order to compare them, a point of observation is needed from where the many different locals can be seen (a universal point of observation). *This point is not "outside" reality in some transcendent*

*or metaphysical space, it is a construction “inside” the reality, allowing the observer a wide range perspective of observations done either in another system, or as self-reflection in the system itself.* To give an example, in this sense ‘theory’ and ‘truth’ are universal marks belonging to the scientific system. “All functional systems assert claims to universality, but only for their respective domains” (Luhmann 1997 p. 982/ II p. 242). Therefore, in order to develop a semantics that understands society as a whole, it has been unavoidable to develop a *combination* of a *universalism* of potentials for thematization and a *specification* of system references. A theory with such combinatory tools is, in Luhmann’s vocabulary, a theory with universal requirements (Luhmann 1990). This kind of theory comes with high demands: it must be able to construct itself, and it must be able to allow a wide range of affiliations:

This of course, does not mean that all theories in Science, or all theories inside a specific discipline could be derived from such universal theory; no more does such a concept presuppose the existence of only one universal theory in Science as such (or in the singular disciplines). It might happen, but it need not be so, that a whole discipline (or even Science as such) is forced into one single paradigm. So claims of universality must not be confused with claims of exclusion. (Luhmann 1990, p. 413).

What the experiment I have in mind sets out to investigate, is what might happen if we formulated a theory of dramaturgy with a wide-range perspective. The word game Luhmann plays with ‘universal’ is perhaps more a provocation than a helpful indication of a systems-theoretical endeavour.

### **A wide-range theory**

To sum up: We need a theory of dramaturgy in order to observe how dramaturges in the art system reflect. Based upon these observations, science may build theories and analytical methods, applicable both to dramaturgy in the art system and other functionally differentiated systems. When dramaturges work as artists within the arts system, they apply a very special kind of analytical competence; this is a matter for *the reflective theory*, and this is, of course, highly context-sensitive. Their academic training (in the science system) should prepare and train them for this, and in order to do so, the *scientific theory* on dramaturgy must be able to reflect and analyse *different reflective theories*, in addition to the fact that it should also include an understanding of dramaturgy within other functional differentiated systems. This requires an appropriate level of theoretical abstraction and another degree of context awareness. The scientific theory of dramaturgy must inform the art of dramaturgy and its reflection. To put it in other words, the dramaturge needs to understand the artistic process of creating theatre from the inside. He or she must know when and how to apply what kind of analytical skills, be they procedural, thematic, or semantic matters concerning actor, text, space, or audience. This requires an understanding of how we generate meaning and thus knowledge of communication, an understanding of how evolutions of works of art are made, and factual themes are produced. We need to develop a theory that is applicable in both micro- and macro-analytical processes, and it must allow us to apply all dimensions of meaning-making procedures. This requires a theory that allows a shift in point of perspective (from near to distanced) but still functions within the same epistemological frame. It is the task for the science system to develop this theory, and it must consequently work scientifically. This is an altogether different context. With the proper training and understanding of the scientific dramaturgy, dramaturges should be well equipped to join in artistic processes.

I advocate the necessity for a “wide-range” theory, but perhaps for other reasons as those



evident in the newspeak of university management. It is amazing how words such as “innovative”, “internationalising”, “inter-disciplinarily” pop up with such very high frequency. These are words with broad semantic fields, but their efficiency is probably primarily due to the way in which they manage to connect to a tantalising fear of competition on knowledge, power and resources, implicitly threatening the non-believers with disempowerment and impoverishment. We all want to be world leaders in a cognitive capitalism. We all want to show how exactly our discipline within science can provide knowledge into the new order. We are not able to reverse the novel situation; we cannot turn our backs to the legitimate demands from the coming generations of students at the new mass-universities. They too must be met with research-based knowledge. We cannot ignore our commitments as researchers in humanities to contribute to create descriptions of society and its values to society, presenting ideas and concepts that may allow us to fathom, observe and describe more paradoxes tomorrow than today. One possible consequence to be drawn from these facts is to experiment with the development of a wide-range theory. It is a call for a theory that is able to retort, intensify and qualify the debate on the *values* immanent in society. In this endeavour, a new theory on dramaturgy might play its own modest part.

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